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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CE JAMIE MOORE.  
NSC FOR JHOVENIER.

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [HU](#)  
SUBJECT: SOCIALIST PM CANDIDATE TALKS CAMPAIGN STRATEGY  
WITH AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Political Counselor Paul O'Friel  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Socialist prime ministerial candidate Attila Mesterhazy is planning a vigorous nation-wide campaign against Viktor Orban's well-oiled Fidesz machine. Although likely to go down in defeat in the April elections, Mesterhazy is positioning himself for the inevitable internal struggle for power within the Socialist party, with ambitions to combine the post of party president with his current position as caucus leader. End Summary.

ONE MILLION HANDSHAKES AND  
THE MESSAGE "IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID"  
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¶2. (C) Socialist party caucus leader and prime ministerial candidate Attila Mesterhazy briefed Ambassador February 2 on his campaign plans for the run-up to April's national elections. His slogan, he said, would be "one million handshakes" in a nation-wide door-to-door effort to get out the Socialist message and mobilize voters.

¶3. (C) Cribbing from the American playbook, Mesterhazy said he intended to harp on the theme, "It's the economy, stupid." He said his party would focus on three main axes. The first would emphasize the concrete results the Socialists had achieved while in office, with a stress on the accomplishments of the Bajnai government. The second would highlight Fidesz's "lies" and unrealistic promises. The third would articulate Socialist values and their vision for Hungary's future. Mesterhazy said the Socialists had already test-marketed their message and slogans in several villages and were ready for a national roll-out the week of February 8.

¶4. (C) Mesterhazy, however, recognizes he faces a tough fight against opposition leader Viktor Orban and his well-oiled Fidesz machine. With name recognition and popularity still low and Socialists' poll numbers at 20-30 percent, Mesterhazy admitted, "We have a long way to go."

¶5. (C) Nonetheless, Mesterhazy believes that, with the country demanding change, his youth (he is 36) and relative newness on the political stage represent distinct advantages. He observed that Orban has been a fixture in Hungarian political life for more than 20 years. "Someone who has been around that long can't represent change; they're simply not credible. I, however, can."

CERTAIN SOCIALISTS CAN WIN IN 2014,  
WITH AMBITIONS TO BECOME PARTY PRESIDENT  
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¶6. (C) Although professing to believe in a miracle in April, Mesterhazy is quick to concede that defeat is all but certain, and is clearly positioning himself to be the

dominant figure in his party in the post-election landscape. Saying that the Socialist party needed innovation and modernization, he stated that, "The day after the elections, we have to evaluate seriously the last eight years, and then change modalities and personalities." "I am certain we can win in 2014," Mesterhazy added.

¶7. (C) Mesterhazy said he intended to stay on as caucus leader and fight to be the party's president. He expected a challenge from former Prime Minister Gyurcsany, a one-time mentor for whom he has little love. "We can't let him regain power," Mesterhazy said. Mesterhazy continued that he had good relations with Prime Minister Bajnai, who would campaign for him. More technocrat than politician, Bajnai had done a good job as prime minister, he said. Mesterhazy predicted Bajnai would leave office with a good reputation and would have "no problem finding his way" whatever he subsequently chose to do.

¶8. (C) COMMENT. Clever, adroit, and ambitious, Mesterhazy has taken up his party's standard in a doomed campaign as a way to develop nation-wide name recognition -- something he has lacked -- as well as to position himself for the inevitable internal struggle for power after the Socialist's all-but-certain defeat. Whatever the outcome of either fight, we expect he is going to be around the political scene here for some time to come.  
KOUNALAKIS